

Interaction and Social Complexity in Lingnan during the First Millennium B.C.



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SEPARATED FROM AREAS north of it by mountain ranges and drained by a single river system, the region of Lingnan in southeastern China is a distinct physiographic province (Fig. 1). The home of historically recorded tribes, it was not until the late first millennium B.C. that Lingnan was incorporated into the expanding Chinese polities of central and northern China. The Qin, Han, and probably the Chu before them not only knew of those they called barbarians in southeastern China but also pursued an expansionary policy that would help establish the boundaries of the modern Chinese state in later times.

The first millennium B.C. in Lingnan witnessed the development of a bronze metallurgy and its subsequent widespread use by the seventh or sixth centuries B.C. Archaeological work over the last decades has led to the discovery of a number of Bronze Age burials scattered over much of northern Lingnan and dating to approximately 600 to 200 B.C., a period covering the middle-late Spring and Autumn period and all of the Warring States period (Fig. 2). These important discoveries have helped establish the region as the theater for the emergence of social complexity before the arrival of the Qin and Han dynasties in Lingnan. Nevertheless, and in keeping with traditional models of interpretation, Chinese archaeologists have tried to understand this material in the context of contact with those expanding states located to the north of Lingnan. The elaborate material culture and complex political structures associated with these states has usually meant that change in those so-called peripheral areas (including Lingnan) could only be the result of cultural diffusion from the center.

Although more recent interpretations of the Bronze Age in Lingnan have emphasized the distinctive features of a part of its material culture (Qiu 1991), the identification of similarities with and differences from northern areas still remains an important objective of archaeologists working on Bronze Age Lingnan. Unfortunately, the continuing debate surrounding the issue of cultural primacy within China itself is one that has focused on chronology, typology, and the diffusion of cultural features without establishing the relevance of such features in the operation of social systems at the local level. Furthermore, and in response

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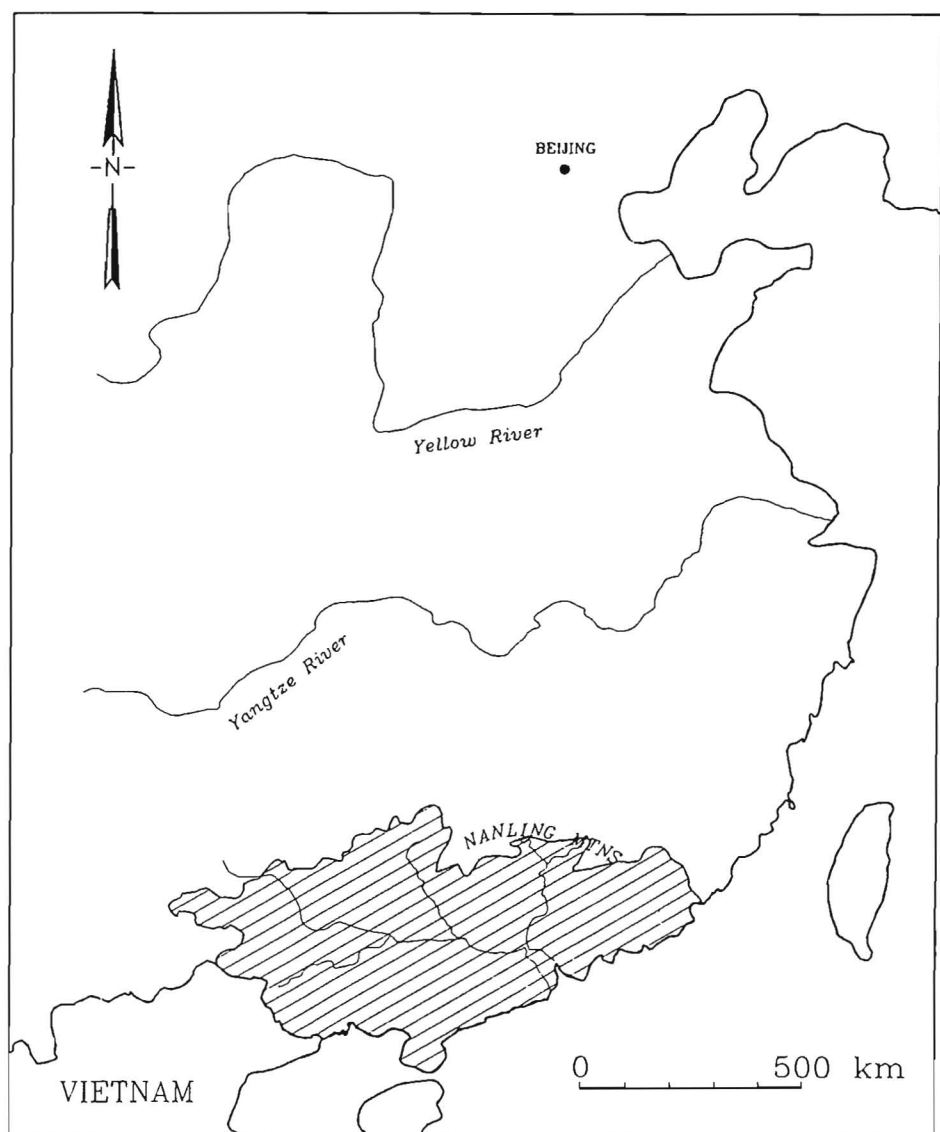


Fig. 1. The location of Lingnan in present-day China.

to the traditional view of wholesale transmission of innovations and culture from the north to the south, some have even argued for the primacy of Lingnan as the initiator of many features and their diffusion toward central and northern China during prehistory (Meacham 1977).

This study builds on the data provided by investigations of Bronze Age burials in Lingnan and aims to present a view of emerging complex societies that recognizes that contact with central China was crucial to this development. Nevertheless, it makes use of information on the nature of such contact and the changing archaeological landscape in Lingnan during the period 600–200 B.C. to propose a

BC	Historical Chronology of China	Bronze Age Burials in Lingnan (see text)
0	Han Dynasty	
206	Qin Dynasty	
221	Warring States Period	"Late" Burials
475		"Early" Burials
	Spring and Autumn Period	
770	Western Zhou	
1050		

Fig. 2. Chronological table.

model for the operation of social systems at the local level within the context of long-distance interaction. At a more general level, we find evidence that, although the early stages of emerging complexity may in some cases be associated with the status accorded to the leader through ritual and display, the continued maintenance of complex social systems requires the control of a wider base of production.

LINGNAN DURING THE BRONZE AGE

What we know about Lingnan during its Bronze Age comes from a synthesis of scant historical sources and the results of archaeological investigations over the last decades. In the case of Guangdong Province, Chinese archaeologists have in the past years presented summaries of the material (Huang 1986; Qiu 1984, 1991; Xu 1984). Much less has been published on the Bronze Age of the province of Guangxi. Unfortunately, the archaeological study of Lingnan suffers from a number of problems associated with other regions in China, namely the lack of systematic surveys and an overreliance on the most elaborate features of an archaeological culture.

In the case of Lingnan, this has meant the publication of information about many Bronze Age burials although very few sites have been systematically excavated. In fact, more is known about settlement patterns during the Neolithic in Lingnan than during the first millennium B.C. (Yang 1986). The Neolithic is associated with concentrations of occupation in a number of areas, including northern Guangdong, western Guangdong, the Zhujiang (Pearl River) delta, and southern Guangxi. It is interesting, as shown below, that the most elaborate and largest concentration of Bronze Age material in Lingnan is found west and north-west of the delta some distance from the many Late Neolithic sites identified in the delta. It is important to note that, aside from the well-known Late Neolithic sites of northern Guangdong (e.g., Shixia), neither settlement patterns nor burial data associated with this period point to a high level of social complexity in Lingnan at this time, in any case not comparable with that evident from Bronze Age material. If we can believe that past surveys have in fact revealed actual patterns of occupation, we may therefore suggest that the most elaborate features of Bronze Age occupation in Lingnan emerged in areas not blessed with a particularly strong Neolithic tradition, thus pointing to an important leap in the level of social complexity between the two periods in these areas.

The archaeological record of Lingnan during the first millennium B.C. indicates the widespread knowledge of bronze metallurgy at that time. It has been suggested that simple bronze tools were already being made in Hong Kong before the turn of the first millennium B.C. (Meacham, 1993, pers. comm.), an idea that finds some support in the existence of bronze-using societies by the mid-second millennium B.C. in northern Viet Nam and even earlier in northern China. The emerging view is thus of an emerging Bronze Age throughout Lingnan and Southeast Asia by the second half of the second millennium B.C., well before the arrival of the Chu. However, the early stages of such bronze metallurgy were not necessarily associated with high levels of social complexity. Aside from these bronzes in Lingnan, which are found as strays or in burials, we find scattered throughout much of northern Lingnan sherds of the characteristic high-fired stamped geometric pottery of southern China. Some of the designs, such as the "double-F," are specific to Lingnan. As mentioned above, however, very few excavations (and none associated with the burials) have been carried out, so that the stratigraphic relationship between the various designs is still being debated.

The period under discussion saw the emergence and decline of the state of Chu in central China. By 600 B.C., the earliest date for Bronze Age burials in central and northern Lingnan, the Chu were expanding militarily in many directions, including southward, from their homeland in central China. Some early texts, such as the *Shiji*, suggest that the Chu in fact occupied Lingnan (or part of it) and established a capital there (relevant parts of the *Shiji* are discussed in Xu 1984). Although the location and date of such occupation is debated among Chinese historians, many agree that the Chu entered Lingnan during the first half of the Warring States period, possibly around 400 B.C. or earlier. In 333 B.C., the Chu annexed the state of Yue to its east. One interpretation of the consequences of this event is that the population of the Yue escaped to the south, where they established a number of tribes known as the "Bai Yue" (or "One hundred Yue"). Two of these tribes, the Nanyue and the Xi Ou, are in fact thought by

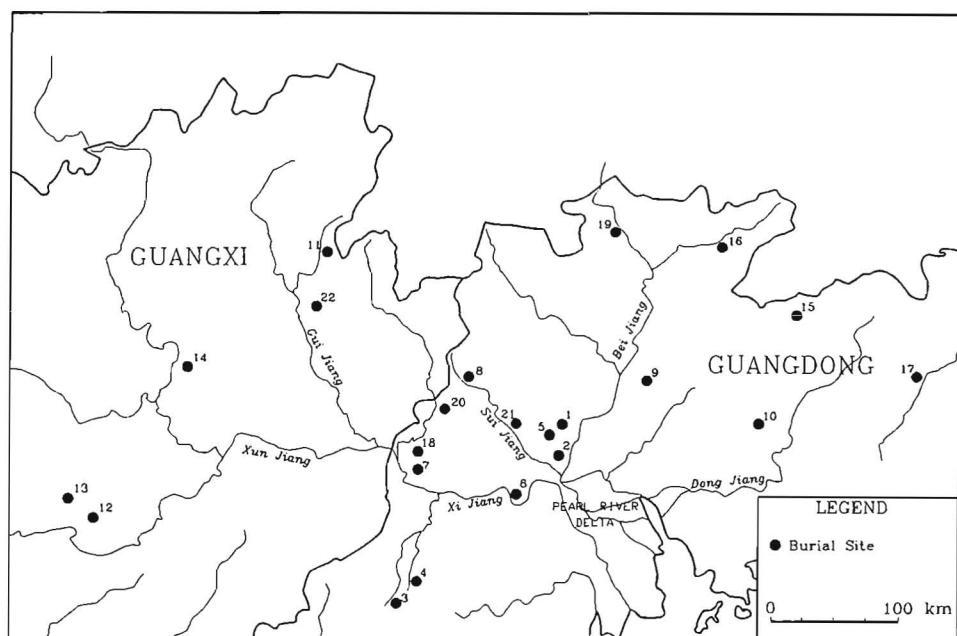


Fig. 3. Burial sites mentioned in the text: 1, Matougang; 2, Niaodanshan; 3, Nanmendong; 4, Beifushan; 5, Gaodiyuan; 6, Beilingsongshan; 7, Luoyanshan; 8, Lanmashan; 9, Qilingshan; 10, Huanggangling; 11, Yangjia; 12, Weipocun; 13, Liangshuiping; 14, Xia'neicao; 15, Longzishan; 16, Hantouling; 17, Bayushan; 18, Niuweishan; 19, Dagongpingcun; 20, Liyangdun; 21, Tonggugang; 22, Yinshanling.

Chinese archaeologists and historians to have occupied parts of Guangdong and Guangxi, respectively. These tribes may very well be associated with the material discussed in this paper.

Regardless of whether or not the Chu did in fact occupy Lingnan, it does seem clear that they knew of it and its exotic resources. These resources included a number of southern products such as ivory, cinnamon, pearls, peacock feathers, and rhinoceros horns. The Qin, who defeated the Chu in the late third century B.C. and occupied Lingnan, and the Han soon after them were all in fact interested in these exotica. It has been suggested that their expansion southward may have had something to do with the attractions of these products (Wang 1959).

RESULTS

To date, over 220 pre-Qin Bronze Age burials have been located at 22 sites in central and northern Lingnan (Fig. 3 and Table 1). The contents and dimensions of 174 of these have been reported in the literature, with some of the sites being reported incompletely. Many burials have been partially or completely disturbed, with some artifacts missing and the burial dimensions and artifact locations often unclear. In the case of Tonggugang (no. 21), the material for seven disturbed burials is reported together. It should be pointed out that five of the sites make

TABLE 1. LOCATION, DATE, AND NUMBER OF BURIALS
AT EACH SITE MENTIONED IN THE TEXT

SITE NO.	NAME (COUNTY, PROVINCE)	NO. OF BURIALS	DATE	REFERENCE
1	Matougang (Qingyuan, GD)	1	Late S&A	GDWW 1963
		1	Early WS	GDWW 1964
2	Niaodanshan (Sihui, GD)	1	Early WS	GDBWG 1975
3	Nanmendong (Luoding, GD)	1	Late S&A-Early WS	GDBWG 1983
		1	Late WS	GDBWG 1983
		1	Early WS	GDBWG 1983
4	Beifushan (Luoding, GD)	1	Early WS	GDBWG and LDWHJ 1986
5	Gaodiyuan (Sihui, GD)	2	Mid-Late WS	He 1985
6	Beilingsongshan (Zhaoqing, GD)	1	Mid-Late WS	GDBWG and ZQWHJ 1974
7	Luoyanshan (Deqing, GD)	1	Late WS	GDBWG et al. 1973
8	Lanmashan (Huaiji, GD)	1	Late S&A	He 1985
9	Qilingshan (Fogang, GD)	1	WS	He 1985
10	Huanggangling (Longmen, GD)	1	Late WS	He 1985
11	Yangjia (Gongcheng, GX)	1	Late S&A-Early WS	GXBWG 1973
12	Weipocun (Binyang, GX)	2	WS	GXWW 1983
13	Liangshuiping (Binyang, GX)	1	S&A	Liang Jingjin 1978
14	Xia'neicao (Xiangzhou, GX)	1	WS	GXBWG 1984
15	Longzishan (Heping, GD)	1	Late S&A	Liu Jian'an 1988
16	Hantouling (Shixing, GD)	2	Late S&A	SXBWG 1988
17	Bayushan (Wuhua, GD)	1	Early WS	Qiu Licheng and Li Xiongkun 1988
18	Niuweishan (Fengkai, GD)	7	Late S&A	Yang Shiting and Deng Zengkui 1989
19	Dagongpingcun (Lechang, GD)	7	Late S&A	LCWWZ 1989
		> 20	WS	LCWWZ 1989
20	Liyangdun (Fengkai, GD)	1	Early WS	Yang et al. 1991
		7	Mid WS	Yang et al. 1991
		20	Late WS	Yang et al. 1991
21	Tonggugang (Guangning, GD)	22	Late WS	GDBWG 1981
22	Yinshanling (Pingle, GX)	110	Late WS	GXWW 1978

ABBREVIATIONS: GD, Guangdong Province; GX, Guangxi Province; S&A, Spring and Autumn Period; WS, Warring States Period; GDBWG, Guangdongsheng Bowuguan (Guangdong Provincial Museum); GDWW, Guangdongsheng Wenwu Guanli Weiyuanhui (Cultural Relics Management Committee of Guangdong Province); GXBWG, Guangxi Zhuangzu Zizhiq Bowuguan (Museum of the Guangxi Zhuang Minority Autonomous Region); GXWW, Guangxi Zhuangzu Zizhiq Wenwu Gongzuodui (Cultural Relics Work Team of the Guangxi Zhuang Minority Autonomous Region); LCWWZ, Lechang Wenwuzhi Bianzuan Bangongshi Bian (Compilation Office of the Annals of Lechang Cultural Relics); LDWHJ, Luodingxian Wenhua ju (Cultural Bureau of Luoding County); SXBWG, Shixingxian Bowuguan (Shixing County Museum); ZQWHJ, Zhaoqingshi Wenhua ju (Cultural Bureau of Zhaoqing City).

up the majority of the burials. These are Yinshanling (no. 22) with 110 burials, Dagongpingcun (no. 19) with about 30 burials, Liyangdun (no. 20) with 28 burials, Tongugang (no. 21) with 22 burials, and the site of Niuweishan (no. 18), where seven jar burials have been reported. The burials at these larger sites may date to different times within the period under consideration or even to the later Qin or Han. The Qin and Han burials are not discussed in this paper.

It is suggested here that the published data on the Bronze Age burials of Lingnan may be sufficient for an initial attempt at uncovering temporal and spatial patterning of the material. Although these emerging patterns may be the result of uneven archaeological work throughout the region, we must rely on the information currently available and trust that the results of this investigation will provide the background against which future discoveries can be assessed. The following offers a summary of the main features of these burials, including observations on the spatial patterning of the material and the changes evident in the content and location of the burials over time.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

Looking first at the distribution of all 22 burial sites spanning the whole period under consideration (Spring and Autumn, and Warring States periods), we notice a concentration in the northern half of Lingnan, in particular north and west of the Zhujiang delta near the confluence of the Xi Jiang, Sui Jiang, and Bei Jiang Rivers. Many of these burials are located along tributaries that empty into rivers allowing access to the northern mountain ranges, where passes are located, and thus to areas in central China controlled by the Chu (Fig. 3). Although many of the burials were damaged before discovery, it is clear on the basis of available information that the burial custom throughout this period was for single, supine, and extended burial in a rectangular vertical pit. The exceptions include the seven jar burials located at the site of Niuweishan (no. 18).

The great majority of burials contain bronze artifacts, with bronze being the material of choice in the assemblages. The burials from which no bronzes have been reported include six of the seven jar burials at Niuweishan (no. 18), M1 at Tonggugang (no. 21), M1 at Hantouling (no. 16), and the disturbed burial at Bayushan (no. 17). The bronzes consist mainly of vessels, bells, tools, and weapons. Ceramic vessels are also commonly found. Stone artifacts, which are not so common, are mostly restricted to polishing stones, although precious stones such as jades have been recovered from rich burials. Iron tools are also found in the latest burials.

Although a number of bronzes are thought to have been manufactured north of Lingnan (see below for discussion), the majority of artifacts are likely to have been made locally. Of these, many display a distinctive "southern" style, including, for example, a characteristic Ding tripod with splayed feet. It is interesting that many rich burials contain a distinctive artifact also found only in Lingnan, namely a human- or animal-headed bronze staff. These staffs are usually found in groups of two or four, often near the corners of the burial pit. We will return to this later on.

The content, date, and distribution of the "richest" burials at these 22 sites deserve close attention. Here, a minimum of 25 burial artifacts has been arbitrar-

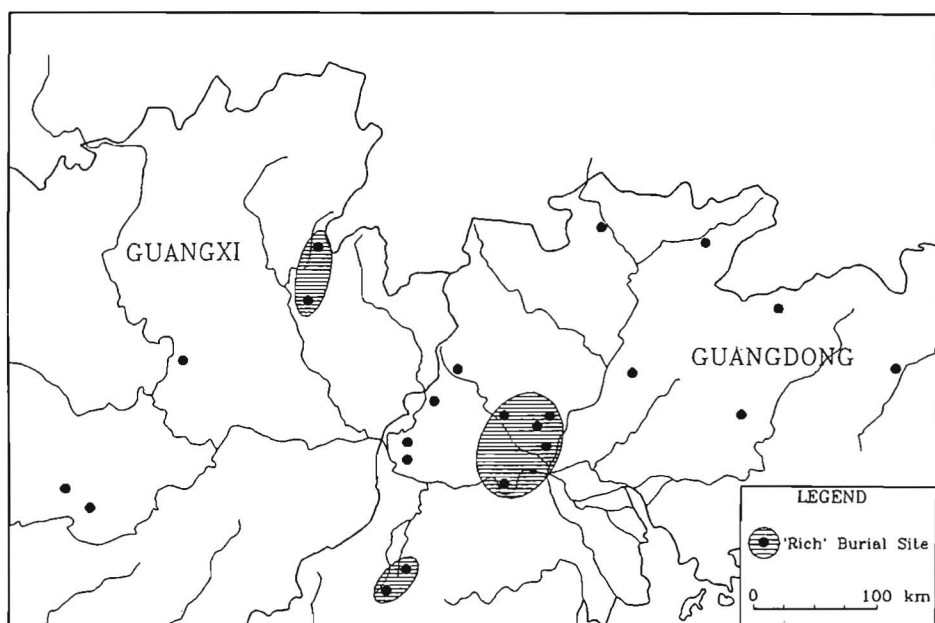


Fig. 4. "Rich" Bronze Age burials in Lingnan (early and late).

ily chosen as the defining feature of a "rich" burial. A total of 17 such burials has been identified at nine sites (Fig. 4). The distribution of these sites reveals an interesting pattern. Five of the sites are located immediately west or northwest of the Zhujiang delta, two are found in northern Guangxi near its border with Hunan, and the other two are located southwest of the Zhujiang delta along rivers that empty into the Xi Jiang River. Aside from the latter two burials, the distribution of the others reveals a preference for streams that provide access to the northern mountain ranges. Those burials close to the Zhujiang delta are usually surrounded by large expanses of flat and well-watered land, as opposed to those in other more mountainous parts of Lingnan. It does seem, therefore, as if a "richer" core is surrounded by a "poorer" periphery.

CHANGES OVER TIME

The dates provided for the burials by Chinese archaeologists allow us to identify certain interesting trends in the content, number, and location of burials over time. Here, we distinguish between "early" burials dating from the Spring and Autumn period to the middle-late Warring States period and those "late" burials dated to the late Warring States period. We shall focus on the features of these early and late burials and point to a number of trends over time.

1. Number of Burials — It is clear that the number of burials increases over time. In contrast to the earlier burials, which are typically found singly or in small groups, the later period sees the appearance of large cemeteries (although a few late single burials have also been identified). Four of these late Warring States

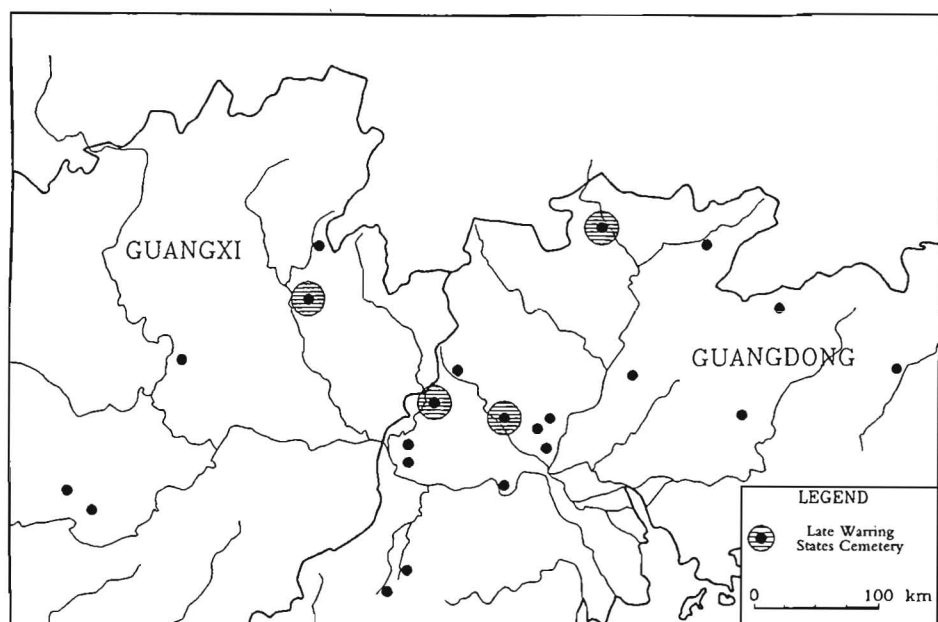


Fig. 5. Late Warring States cemeteries in Lingnan.

cemeteries together make up about 70 percent of all Bronze Age burials discussed in this paper (Fig. 5). These cemeteries are usually well planned and provide evidence for the presence of established communities.

2. Location of the Burials — There is an apparent shift in the location of burial sites over time. The “core” of rich burials discussed above and located west and northwest of the Zhujiang delta is in fact made up mostly of early burials. No single “core” seems to exist by the late Warring States period, when the cemeteries and the few other single burials dating to this period display a more dispersed pattern of distribution than the earlier burials (Fig. 5). In fact, the area near the Zhujiang delta does not seem to have been preferred by the late Warring States period. Although the small number of late Warring States cemeteries known encourages caution, current evidence suggests that these later sites are located along streams that provide particularly good access to northern areas.

3. Nature of the Burial Assemblages — Of the nine sites where rich burials have been located, seven are “early” sites. The eight early rich burials identified at these sites are all characterized by the presence of one to five bronze objects of probable Chu origin, including various types of large and elaborate bronze vessels and, possibly, some of the bells. As in burials located in areas north of Lingnan, the bells are sometimes found in sets in these early rich Lingnan burials. Four of these eight burials are particularly rich, with assemblages made up of at least 60 artifacts, the majority of which are bronzes.

The early burials contain few or no bronze tools or ceramic vessels, whereas

these make up a large proportion of the late assemblages by the late Warring States period. Bronze weapons are found in large numbers throughout the whole period. It is interesting that the later burials almost without exception contain none of the elaborate bronze vessels and bells cast in Chu that are common elements of the earlier rich burial assemblages. The assemblages in fact clearly become "secularized," with the large increase in the number of buried tools of production (axes, knives, scrapers, etc.) and simple ceramic vessels attesting to this trend. Related to this is the decrease in the proportion of bronze artifacts in the assemblages, with ceramics and iron objects becoming increasingly popular as burial goods.

The increasing secularization of the assemblages applies even for the richest late burials, which total nine and are found at two late Warring States burial grounds: Tonggugang (no. 21) and Yinshanling (no. 22). These rich late burials never contain as many artifacts as or attain the level of ostentation displayed by the richest burials of earlier periods. Although this study would greatly benefit from a rigorous analysis of the late Warring States burial data, it does seem as if contrasts between rich and poorer burials at this time are not as sharp as for earlier periods.

The late Warring States cemetery at Yinshanling (no. 22) may serve as an example. The ten richest burials (the richest of which contains 42 artifacts) are scattered among the 100 or so other burials. The number of artifacts among all burials ranges from two to 42. Although the number of objects does not sharply differentiate separate classes of tomb occupants, the richest burials certainly differ from the poorer ones. The richest burials are generally larger and more likely to contain artifacts of probable Chu origin. Although no bells have been recovered from the cemetery, a single Ding tripod vessel probably cast in Chu was found in the eleventh richest burial. Six of the 11 richest burials contained bronze staffs. The richest burials were also more likely to contain swords or lances cast north of Lingnan. It must be emphasized, however, that not only are there very few of these "foreign" artifacts but also that they are unlike the elaborate ritual vessels and bells found in the earlier rich burials. In many cases, they may have been obtained as a result of contact through warfare. Nevertheless, they seem to be associated in the burials with some measure of wealth or power. Finally, it should also be pointed out that later burials continue to share a number of common features with Chu graves, both in the structure of the burial (pit dimensions, coffins) and in artifact styles.

DISCUSSION

A synthesis of historical and archaeological data available on the Bronze Age of Lingnan allows us to consider a number of approaches to understanding the patterning of material described above. A number of issues stand out as being of primary importance in the investigation of processes operating at the local level. At one level, these include the nature and importance of contact between Lingnan and the Chu, the identification of the tomb occupants, and the meaning of changes in the location and content of burials over time. One final aim is to put forward a model to explain the changing nature of the power base at the local level.

All of the following interpretations are of course based on a data base that is undeniably insufficient, biased, and dependent on a chronology provided by a few Chinese archaeologists. It is even questionable whether the view of society provided by burial data alone is not itself a distortion of reality in which funerary behavior serves to conceal or alter, for whatever reason, existing social and political structures. Certainly, the data base is problematic at a number of levels. The absence of settlement sites and the near-complete absence of poorer graves associated with the early rich burials is particularly discouraging, as are the historical records, which are unclear about precise locations or dates. We are thus left with a set of data that, although relatively consistent in the spatial and temporal patterns they provide, may in fact not reflect the reality of processes at the local level. The following is thus simply an attempt at bringing together some of the available information and providing models that can be further tested after archaeological fieldwork is expanded to include other categories of data.

We can begin by pointing out that the societies associated with the early rich burials were probably ranked, possibly chiefdoms, although the absence of settlement or other burial data makes this a tentative explanation. Certainly, the nature of the available burial data suggests the existence of leaders wielding some amount of control over local production. The concentration in the richest burials of local artifacts requiring a high level of craftsmanship, such as jade ornaments, suggests this. Although the majority of bronze artifacts in these burials do not in fact display a high level of craftsmanship, their concentration in large numbers in the burials may also suggest control over production. There is, however, no further evidence to support this idea.

A number of observations point to the possible importance of contacts with the Chu in the emergence of these ranked societies. First, the early rich burials appear rather suddenly by the end of the Spring and Autumn period in areas with as yet no burial evidence dating to the preceding periods (Neolithic and Western Zhou). This period corresponds to the rise of the Chu in central China and their expansion southward. In the Zhujiang delta, which is located east of the area where the early rich burials are found, a vigorous occupation dating to the Late Neolithic and Western Zhou periods is documented (Yang 1986). However, no settlements or burials approaching the level of social complexity suggested by the early rich burials of the late Spring and Autumn period have yet been discovered in this area. Second, the earlier burials are typically found in central and northern Lingnan along streams (or their tributaries) that allow access to the northern mountain ranges and their passes leading into the provinces of Hunan and Jiangxi, parts of which were occupied by the Chu. Third, the burial goods themselves point to the movement of goods (in the case of the elaborate vessels and possibly bells) and styles (in the case of many of the other artifacts) between the Chu and Lingnan.

What can we say about the tomb occupants of the rich early burials? Some scholars have suggested that the burials are those of Chu statesmen or generals, but others support the idea of various local Yue leaders (discussed in Li 1991). In support of the former, some point to a number of historical records that mention the interest in Lingnan showed by the Chu, the expedition they mounted against the Yue tribes of the area in the fifth century B.C., as well as the establishment of a Chu capital (Chuting) near the Zhujiang delta (mentioned in the

Shiji). Although there exists some disagreement concerning the exact area controlled by the Chu and the date of their arrival, most scholars in fact support the idea of a Chu presence in Lingnan in the early Warring States period (Xu 1984). On the other hand, this presence does not necessarily imply that the burials are those of the Chu. In fact, the mixed burial assemblages, which include a number of artifacts and stylistic features distinctive to Lingnan (or clearly concentrated in Lingnan), suggest that local leaders were buried at these sites. It is likely that Chu leaders would have either been sent back to their homeland for burial or would have only been buried with Chu material.

Furthermore, the earliest date for the rich Lingnan burials predates the suggested arrival of the Chu by about 100 years. Finally, a number of scholars have suggested that the bronze staffs found in the rich burials are in fact tribal markers or symbols (Qiu 1991). The distribution of these staffs provides tantalizing clues about the identity of the deceased (Fig. 6). The human-headed staffs are almost exclusively found in central-western Guangdong, and the animal-headed staffs are found at two sites in northeastern Guangxi. It is possible that this pattern corresponds to the different homelands associated with two different and historically recorded Yue tribes, namely the Nanyue ("southern Yue") in Guangdong and the Xi Ou ("western Ou") in Guangxi. It is thus probable that the occupants of the tomb were Yue leaders.

We can now attempt to explain why the "core" of late Spring and Autumn–Warring States culture lies in central-western Guangdong and what the nature of the relationship between the Yue and the Chu may have been. For example, we may ask: if contact with the Chu was so important, why is there relatively little bronze material dating to this period in northern Guangdong, which is certainly

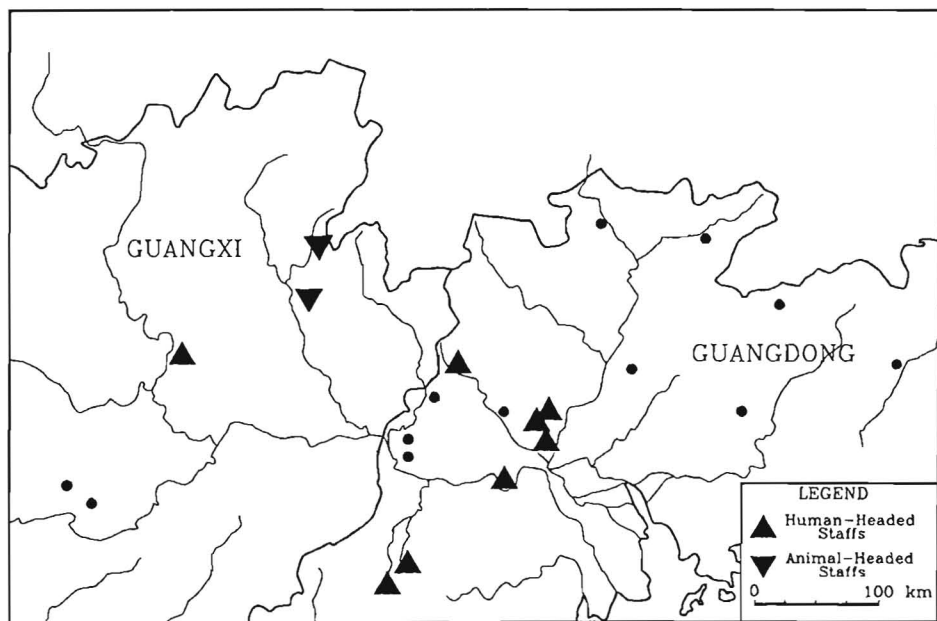


Fig. 6. Bronze staffs found in Bronze Age burials in Lingnan.

closer to Chu state as well as along the route of communication between the two cultures? Central-western Guangdong may have been an ideal location for a number of reasons. First, unlike many surrounding areas (including northern Guangdong), the area immediately north and west of the Zhujiang delta is blessed with extensive level and well-watered land, sometimes located within the confines of basins. The agricultural potential of these areas would undoubtedly have been an important advantage. Second, the area north and west of the delta lies at the junction of a number of streams that flow to or from all parts of Lingnan. This is important in the case of Lingnan, where movement between river valleys is hampered by the mountainous landscape found throughout much of the area.

Finally, as mentioned above, we find that northern states had for a long time been interested in the natural resources of Lingnan, in particular exotic products such as ivory, cinnamon, rhinoceros horn, pearls, peacock feathers, as well as other products. This interest, which is clearly stated in the case of the Qin and Han dynasties, is also thought to have preceded their arrival. In the light of this possibility, we may examine once more the location of the "rich" burials of central-west Guangdong. Li and Qiao (1991:78) provide a map of the coastline during the mid-first millennium B.C. that shows that the Zhujiang delta still had not formed completely and that these sites were at that time located close to the South China sea. Although the area is currently connected to the sea through numerous rivers and canals, the coastline probably extended west of the present-day western edge of the delta. Even without this evidence, a look at the map clearly shows that the "rich" burials were along or close to the quickest route between Chu state and the sea.

It should also be pointed out that, until the end of the fourth century B.C., when the Chu defeated the state of Yue (not the Yue tribes) located along the east coast of central China, their access to the ocean would have been blocked in that direction. Possibly, the delta may have facilitated access by watercraft to other areas along the coast, either for commercial or for political activities. Finally, this would certainly have been the best location for the harvesting of pearls. The location of the two early and rich burials southwest of the Zhujiang delta is more difficult to explain. It is possible that these sites, which are both located at a point where their respective streams emerge from the higher hills, were situated to take advantage of efficient river communication as well as the mountainous and forested environment that may have provided the ivory and exotic feathers preferred by the Chu.

The nature of the relationship between local Yue leaders and the Chu is certainly difficult to explain. One possibility, suggested by the composition of the burial assemblages and the above-mentioned historical texts, is that Yue chiefs acted as the managers for the collection of exotica preferred by the Chu. They would, therefore, have inhabited areas that allowed for access to the Chu and to other areas of Lingnan, as well as to these natural resources. The region west and northwest of the delta, where a number of large streams meet, would certainly have been such an area. We may assume the emergence of local power structures from a documented earlier occupation base (albeit a diffuse one displaying a low level of social complexity) rather than an influx of population intent on taking advantage of the geographic benefits of this area. In this scenario, local

leaders could have been rewarded with support by the Chu, as well as with elaborate artifacts unavailable in Lingnan. For this reason, we find rich burials and Chu objects mainly in those strategic areas, with burials in "peripheral" areas associated with societies of lesser complexity because they were not in contact with the Chu, although in control of their own local bronze production.

Turning now to the late Warring States burials, we must explain the near absence of bronze goods cast in Chu, the possible decrease of direct Chu influence, and, on the basis of a limited number of available burial sites, their movement away from the Zhujiang delta. It is suggested by some scholars that, by the end of the Warring States period, the Chu had withdrawn from Lingnan or begun paying less attention to it, a policy change caused by the need to check the advance of the Qin armies in the north, an advance that would ultimately (in 223 B.C.) lead to the overthrow of the Chu (Xu 1984). Nevertheless, the importance of the Chu had surely not vanished. As mentioned earlier, these late Warring States burials are situated along rivers that allowed easy access to the north, and the material recovered from these burials displays the still significant stylistic influence of the Chu on Lingnan.

CONCLUSIONS

The traditional approach to the interpretation of material in Lingnan has been to see the region as reacting passively to inputs from the north. I suggest that events in Lingnan during the Bronze Age did in fact reflect changes of a political and economic nature taking place in central China. This is supported by the spatial and temporal patterning of the material found in burials and by what we know of historical events as they relate to the state of Chu. This is not to say that a simple model of cultural diffusion can or should be adopted. Among Western-trained archaeologists, different approaches to understanding interregional interaction have been popular at different times (Schortman and Urban 1987). Such approaches could certainly be profitably adapted to the case of Bronze Age Lingnan after more systematic data (especially nonburial data) are collected. For now, we can only point to a number of features of this interaction.

First, it is unclear what the initial conditions of the earliest emergence of ranked societies in Lingnan were, just as we are unsure about the nature of the relationship between Yue leaders and their Chu neighbors on the basis of current evidence. A number of issues still elude us: Did local chiefs gain power as the result of earlier unrelated events and processes that we do not understand? Did they then use this power to obtain, on their own terms, Chu artifacts? Did these leaders participate in a trade of exotic goods? Was the relationship between the Yue and the Chu more balanced than that between patron and client?

Second, any consideration of interregional interaction must consider how contact is played out at the local level. One possible approach is to consider the changing archaeological landscape in Lingnan, as described earlier. Here, we may look at the factors underlying the *maintenance*, rather than the *emergence*, of complex societies in Lingnan. What we are faced with is an earlier development in which very rich burials display clear evidence of the importance of ritual, display, and direct contact with the Chu, followed by the more diffuse distribution

of "secularized" burials in which contact with the Chu is still evident. One possible scenario presents us with a view that is of some relevance to our understanding of the emergence of complex societies in general. In Lingnan, the earlier burials may have been associated with small-scale societies in which leaders depended on the benefits of direct contact with a more advanced society. These benefits would include support by the Chu in exchange for their participation in some type of commercial exchange, and elaborate artifacts used to bolster their status while on display or used during ceremonies associated with these objects. These bronze vessels and bells certainly suggest that ritual behavior, along with the objects themselves, was transferred from north to south at that time.

These earlier burials contain almost no domestic artifacts, including tools for woodworking and agriculture or vessels used for cooking or serving. To conclude, they therefore present a view of a leadership very much removed from the common people and their activities, and dependent on ritual and ostentatious display as a means to maintain status and power. There is certainly no clear evidence that these leaders were in control of bronze production, with local bronzes usually displaying a relatively low level of craftsmanship. In the case of the poorer burials located at this time on the "periphery," we witness the emergence of a local leadership also probably not dependent on the control of bronze production, which in these areas was carried out on a small scale. In these "peripheral" burials, there exists little evidence for ritual behavior, ostentatious display, or dependence on contact with the Chu for maintaining status.

We may suggest that, once the Chu withdrew from or lost interest in Lingnan, these early leaders lost the means of maintaining their power. The local populations, who supported them in times of war and who had indirectly benefitted from interaction with the Chu, would now have little reason to support these chiefs. For the leaders, ritual and display could no longer work as a means of assuring the support of followers. By the late Warring States period, the societies that were to flourish were those located closer to the Chu along waterways that allowed efficient access to them. At that time, contact with the Chu would have been more diffuse and local power certainly not dependent on the ownership of artifacts cast north of Lingnan. Local leaders were buried among their own people, with rich burials showing clear evidence of the importance of productive activities of all kinds. The presence of both weapons and domestic artifacts in these rich burials suggests that the leaders may have controlled a much wider and stable base of production than their predecessors near the Zhujiang delta. The size and organization of the cemeteries point to large, stable, and agricultural communities. It should be pointed out that the late Warring States cemeteries are themselves located in wide river valleys or basins, all of which would likely have been sufficiently productive to support a large population and provided a possible base for the control of productive activities by leaders. Further survey work to locate settlements, including a study of carrying capacities of these areas, is essential if we wish to understand the power structures that characterized Lingnan society in these areas at that time.

Some models concerned with explaining the emergence of complex societies emphasize the crucial importance of external contact or of ritual and display, either in helping establish the earliest power structures or in assuring their main-

tenance (Earle 1987). The study reported here presents evidence that ritual and display may be insufficient if control of a wide base of production is not assured. It is also suggested that direct contact between societies at different levels of development and involving the participation of only a small portion of the population may also not necessarily ensure the continuation of the power structure.

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ABSTRACT

Lingnan, located in the southeast of China, saw during the first millennium B.C. the emergence of ranked bronze-using societies preceding the arrival of the Qin and Han at the end of the third and second centuries B.C. Most of the published data is limited to excavated burials dated to the period 600–200 B.C. The spatial and temporal patterning of this burial data points to a number of interesting features. Earlier rich burials, which are found singly or in small groups, are concentrated west and northwest of the Pearl River delta. In those graves are found large numbers of bronzes, including elaborate vessels cast in the state of Chu (to the north) but few tools and ceramic vessels. The later burials, which are usually “poorer” than the earlier ones, are found mostly in large cemeteries whose pattern of distribution is more dispersed. These include few or no Chu artifacts but many tools and ceramic vessels. It is suggested that the relationship between the local Yue leaders and the Chu may have been closely tied to the latter’s interest in the exotic resources of Lingnan. It is also proposed that, as a result of the decrease of Chu’s interest in Lingnan—possibly caused by their military campaigns against the Qin—the leaders associated with the earlier rich burials would have lost their source of legitimation. The latest burials, located in previously “peripheral” areas, point to the maintenance of complex societies now more dependent on control of a wider base of production rather than on ritual and display. **KEYWORDS:** Lingnan, Chu, bronze, burials, China.